

FOODS AND DRINKS IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ANATOLIA, AS RECORDED BY AMIRDOVLAT AMASIATS'I

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INTRODUCTION

The King of Moths has been kind to Amirdovlat Amasiats'i, since it has preserved a number of his manuscripts, including the monumental description of pharmaceutical simples, humorously entitled *Useless to the Ignorant*.¹ The analysis of this work yields a great number of information on what people ate and drank in fifteenth century Anatolia. This article will try to give a general idea of the edibles that were available to Anatolian populations at that time, without any pretence of being exhaustive.

In 1453 Mehmet II Fetih captures Constantinople. In 1487, Bartolomeo Diaz crosses the Horn of Tempests, later renamed Cape of Good Hope, inaugurating the Western era of exploration of the East, near and far. Ultimately, the West would displace the Near and Middle East from the trade routes they initially controlled. The life of Amirdovlat Amasiats'i straddles this crucial period of East-West relationships.

AMIRDOVLAT'S BIOGRAPHY

Amirdovlat,² son of Eghia, was born in Amasya around 1415-1420, in an Armenian family of probably modest origin.³ Later, he remembered, in his work, his native city—its flowers,⁴ its edible plants,⁵ and even the fish in its rivers.⁶

¹ This work, composed in Istanbul in 1478, has been translated and then published in the original Armenian by K.H. Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet* (Vienna: Mkit'arean Tparan, 1926) and translated into Russian by S.A. Vartanyan, *Nenuzhnoe dlia neuchei* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1990). In it, each simple is entered in roughly alphabetical order and ascribed a number. This numbering will serve as identifying reference in our future citations from this book.

² Amirdovlat's name is spelled Amirdolvlat in many Armenian manuscripts.

³ Amirdovlat's biographical notices, scarce as they are, can be found in M. Ch'amch'ean, *Patmut'iwn hayots'* (History of the Armenians), vol. 3 (Venice: I Tparani Petrosi Vaghvazeants', 1786), p. 508; H.Ch. Siruni, *Polis ew ir derë* (Constantinople and its role), vol. 1 (Beirut: H.Ch. Siruni, 1965, pp. 260-73); and John L. Gueriguian, "Amirdovlat' Amasiats'i: His Life and Contributions," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 3 (1987), pp. 63-91.

⁴ "The wild-rose bush [*Rosa* L., Rosaceae] is found in Amasya" (Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1299).

⁵ "The strawberry blite [*Chenopodium capitatum* L. Aschers, Chenopodiaceae] can be either green or red and in Amasya, the Turks call it *prprem onashi*" (Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2647).

Between 1440 and 1450, he was in Iran and Iraq to study medicine. He described thus the difficult circumstances of his early life:

I have encountered many difficulties and experienced many tribulations at the hand of the unjust, the strangers, the officials, the kings and the princes. I bought many Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts. I traveled a lot. Depending on the moment, I had to adjust to the good or the bad . . . being sometimes well off and at other times a pauper. I practiced medicine in many different countries. I tested . . . many medicines.⁷

Sometimes between 1450 and 1453, he is introduced to Sultan Mehmet Fetih who, despite his ruthless authoritarianism, was an unprejudiced leader interested in progress through the recruitment of the meritorious. Amirdovlat eventually enters the sultan's employ. In time, he is bestowed the titles of *cerrahbashi* [head surgeon] and *bostanbashi* [chief medical botanist]. He serves his master principally as an ophthalmologist, following him in his campaigns in various parts of Europe and Anatolia. When the sultan dies, the elderly physician is allowed by his successor to retire and spend the last years of his life in Bursa. There he could benefit from the medicinal springs at Çekirce, a few miles from the city, admire the beautiful flowers of a generous nature,⁸ or delight in its abundant foods and fruits.⁹

During his period of success, he married and had a son called Amiredil. He died in 1496.

AMIRDOVLAT'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Amirdovlat was originally trained in the Greco-Arabic pharmacological tradition, whose pharmacopeia was richer than that of the initial Greco-Roman corpus. Indeed, according to a linguistic analysis of a number of old Islamic medical texts, the pharmacopeias of that period possessed drugs that were "33% . . . of Mesopotamian . . . origin, 23% of Greek sources, 18% of Persian, 13% Indian, 5% Arabic, and 3% from ancient Egyptian sources."¹⁰ To this rich collection of drugs,

⁶ "The freshwater catfish [*Silurus glanis*, Siluridae] is named *oeghanos* or *ghlianos* in Amasya. It is long and its head is flat with a big mouth" (Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1871).

⁷ Introduction to the *Useless to the Ignorant*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Armenian collection ms. 244, handwritten by Amirdovlat, dated 1478.

⁸ "The mountain and the plain around abound with a great variety of common flowers . . . daisies, poppies, roses, mustard, eglantine, jessamine, elder blows, blackberry, hops, white and red clover, and many others" (Eliza Cheney Abbott Schneider and Benjamin Scheider, *Letters from Broosa, Asia Minor* [Chambersburg, PA, 1847], pp. 47-48.)

⁹ "Wheat, rye, barley, oats, corn, tobacco, cotton, flax and rice . . . [b]eets, carrots, parsnips, radishes, turnips, squashes, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, cabbages, cauliflowers, artichokes, beans, peas, and potatoes . . . [a]pples, pears, peaches, nectarines, quinces, prunes, plums, citrons, mulberries, cherries, almonds, hazelnuts, olives, figs, walnuts, chestnuts and grapes. . . (Schneider and Scheider, *Letters from Broosa*, p. 48).

¹⁰ Ludwig Edelstein, *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, ed. Owsei Temkin and C. Lilian Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 145

Amirdovlat added whatever unique elements he uncovered in the old Armenian medical tradition.

Being an encyclopedist, Amirdovlat gathered the needed information from the best available sources. Being a polyglot, he was able to access a very large bibliography.

As a critical analyst of scientific texts he assessed the information available to him, apparently free of the medieval habit of unquestioned acceptance of authority. As a linguist, he developed a rich Armenian vocabulary for chemical, botanical and medical terms. Finally, as an experimentalist, he introduced in his volumes the results of his own observations.

His extant bibliography includes the following major works: *Ōgut bzhshkut'ean* (Useful to the Practice of Medicine), A.D. 1466-1469;¹¹ *Vasn nshanats' hiwandin* (Signs of the Sick), 1474; the first pharmacopeia entitled *Khōsk' bzhshkapētats'n* (Sayings of the Master Physicians), 1481; [*Erkrord*] *akhrapetin* (The [Second] Pharmacopeia), 1482; and his masterpiece *Angitats' anpet* (Useless to the Ignorant), 1478-1482. All these manuscripts were written in Armenian and were used by Armenian physicians in the Near and Middle East until the beginning of the twentieth century. Amirdovlat explains why he wrote exclusively in vernacular (not classical) Armenian:

I, worthless servant of God . . . living in Constantinople our capital, have found many pharmacopeias written in Armenian . . . and the descriptions therein of various medicines contained errors and inaccuracies. . . . I write and offer this work, so that those who follow this calling will be able to prepare better medicines.¹²

As a practicing physician, Amirdovlat respected the ancient tradition of favoring preventive medicine; following the precept that "to remain healthy is just as important as the healing of the sick,"¹³ he visited his patients regularly, knew them intimately and advised them on the rules of good life habits, which included a varied diet containing components adjusted to meet the perceived needs of individual patients.

SOME FOODS AND BEVERAGES DESCRIBED BY AMIRDOVLAT

Generalities

The edibles of various origins, as described by Amirdovlat, are quite numerous. Any number of animals and a great number of plants were used either as food or as medicine—the border between the two being usually arbitrary. In essence,

¹¹ The colophons of the extant manuscripts of this work indicate that it was composed in Plovdiv (Philippopolis), Bulgaria, between 1466 and 1469, while Amirdovlat was accompanying the Ottoman armies.

¹² Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Armenian collection ms. 247, f. 88v.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

people ate food that they also thought to be good for them—a form of preventive medicine or placebo, depending on the merits of each case.

Not infrequently, Amirdovlat gives even recipes or particular cooking methods:

- “When cooking [beef] add melon rinds to the pot to cook faster and render it more digestible. I have tried it.”¹⁴
- “The heart [of animals] is difficult to digest and should be fried in oil with pepper, cumin and oregano.”¹⁵
- “Kidney . . . is best when obtained from lamb, and should be cooked with pepper and cinnamon.”¹⁶
- “Cheese can be cut into pieces then fried in olive oil.”¹⁷

Mammals (domesticated)

According to Amirdovlat, cattle and sheep are desirable and provide nourishing meats, particularly if their underlying strengths and weaknesses are recognized and if they are cooked properly. As to pigs, “Christians say that its flesh is the best among meats . . . and its ill effects are counteracted by drinking wine, [and, at the end of the meal, by] consuming sweet and sugary preparations.”¹⁸ Specialty meats—brain, feet, heart, and kidney—are also deemed to be edible if properly prepared.¹⁹

In nineteenth century Bursa, one could find oxen, camels, buffaloes, horses, asses, cows, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, etc.²⁰ All these species are listed in Amirdovlat’s *Useless to the Ignorant*.

Camels are useful in surprising ways. Apparently, their “dried testicles when eaten strengthen the hidden organ,”²¹ while its “urine when drunk will increase the sexual urge.”²² Its flesh is favorably compared with that of the horse.²³ Surprisingly, the “buffalo’s flesh is comparable to that of the cat.”²⁴

Mammals (wild)

In the nineteenth century, in the mountains near Bursa, one could find bear, boar, deer, wildcat, otter, fox, squirrel, rabbit, and weasel.²⁵ All these species are listed in Amirdovlat’s *Useless to the Ignorant*.

¹⁴ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 979.

¹⁵ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 1739.

¹⁶ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 3620.

¹⁷ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 1937.

¹⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 976.

¹⁹ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 75, 828, 833, 1739, 2152, 3442, 3620.

²⁰ Schneider and Scheider, *Letters from Broosa*.

²¹ “Hidden organ” is obviously an euphemism for penis.

²² Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 1189, 2761.

²³ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 988.

²⁴ Basmajian, *Angitats’ anpet*, 982.

²⁵ Schneider and Scheider, *Letters from Broosa*.

The flesh of wild cattle, wild sheep,²⁶ and bear²⁷ are not particularly edible, according to Amirdovlat—which tends to prove that they were nevertheless eaten, at least on occasion. On the other hand, a boar is fine as long as it is “fat.”²⁸ The term *deer* encompasses, in Amirdovlat, a number of species, e.g., deer proper, antelope, and roebuck. They all seem to have been hunted and eaten in fifteenth century Anatolia.

Astonishingly, “the flesh of the hedgehog is tasty and sweet.”²⁹ Even more so, “the hyena’s . . . flesh . . . is comparable to that of the dog.”³⁰

Dairy products

The list of dairy products treated by Amirdovlat is exhaustive: butter, buttermilk, cheese, milk, rennet, and yogurt (made with whole or defatted milk).

These products are accompanied in the “Useless to the Ignorant” by the following notations:

- “There are many kinds of milk [and all] have rich nutrients . . . improving mental functions.”³¹
- Rennet “can be eaten as well as drunk.”³²
- “Cheeses may be aged or fresh and the best cheese is the one that is sweet and tasty. . . . Fresh cheese is a good nutrient.”³³
- “Yogurt [with whole milk] is fattening.”³⁴
- “Buttermilk is from water oozing off yogurt, which is then cooked till it thickens and can be kept.”³⁵

Birds and eggs

Amirdovlat describes highly edible and less edible birds. His list is essentially the same as the one describing the available species of birds in and around Bursa in the nineteenth century.³⁶ The five often cited birds are (in descending order of number of citations): goose, partridge,³⁷ duck, pigeon, and quails.

One curious bird is the ostrich whose “flesh is nourishing [but] heavy,”³⁸ and whose eggs are edible. Why is this bird, not native to Anatolia, cited by Amir-

²⁶ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 985, 986.

²⁷ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 989.

²⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1169.

²⁹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1837.

³⁰ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 602.

³¹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 960.

³² Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 664.

³³ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1937.

³⁴ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 959.

³⁵ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2899.

³⁶ Schneider and Scheider, *Letters from Broosa*.

³⁷ Which is commonly found in Eastern Asia Minor

³⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2385.

dovlat as one well known to the populations? The answer is to be found in the travel notations of Simeon Lehats'i, a seventeenth century Polish-Armenian traveler: "I entered the palace of a Pasha [and found] in the courtyard very large ostriches . . . with feet resembling that of a camel and a small head like that of a goose. . . . Those birds are found in the estate of [Osmanli] grandees [who] sell their eggs at six drachma and eight."³⁹ Apparently, it was fashionable in high Osmanli society to collect exotic animals, while making whatever profit could be achieved from this costly hobby.

Amirdovlat lists various other eggs as edible: That of ducks and geese,⁴⁰ partridges,⁴¹ pigeons,⁴² and sparrows,⁴³ among others. Eggs are cooked "in vinegar [or] mixed with a small amount of flour then fried."⁴⁴ The white of eggs is sometimes drunk raw.

The turtle "is called *tosbagha* by the Turks . . . and its eggs quiet down the cough of children."⁴⁵

Fish and Crustaceans

According to Amirdovlat, "there are two kinds of fish . . . the ones from the sea . . . and . . . the ones from the rivers."⁴⁶ For previously landlocked Armenians, the sea bounty they discovered in Istanbul must have been an exhilarating experience. The crustaceans must have been of particular interest. Amirdovlat describes the crayfish ("of which there are two kinds . . . from the sea or the rivers. . . . The author of this book says that its legs should be removed and its belly sliced . . . [the crayfish] should then be boiled in sweet water.");⁴⁷ and the lobster ("which possesses ten legs that are very long and it possesses horns. . . . It is good food.")⁴⁸

As to fish in general, "it is good food . . . [of which] there are the fresh and the salted varieties. . . . [It is better cooked] in vinegar and oregano, sprinkled with pepper . . . and drunk with wine. . . . Fish can also be stuffed with various spices."⁴⁹

³⁹ Simeon Lehats'i, *Ughegrut'iwn, taregrut'iwn ew hishatakarank'* (Vienna: Mkhit'arean Tparan, 1936), p. 229

⁴⁰ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2821.

⁴¹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2823.

⁴² Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2820.

⁴³ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2822.

⁴⁴ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2820.

⁴⁵ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 3199. It would be interesting to discover the actual sites where turtle eggs were collected and the commercial routes used to bring them to Istanbul.

⁴⁶ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1606.

⁴⁷ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 3013.

⁴⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1876.

⁴⁹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1606.

Reptilians, Amphibians, Gastropods, and Insects

The snake's "head . . . should be cut off and its body sliced . . . put into a new earthenware and seasoned with . . . salt . . . honey . . . dill and . . . figs. . . . Then the pot should be sealed and introduced in an oven. There it will stay till the pot whitens to be removed . . . then citronella rhizome⁵⁰ and Indian leaves⁵¹ are added [to the cooked snake] and eaten. . . . It increases the life-span."⁵²

Preceding the French by some centuries, Amirdovlat states that Anatolian people ate frogs, "which dilate the heart and discolor the urine . . . the best ones belonging to the green variety,"⁵³ and also snails that "are found in mountainous terrain sticking to trees."⁵⁴

The grasshopper "comes in many species. . . . [When] caught and its legs and head [are] removed, [it] becomes edible . . . [if] roasted."⁵⁵ The best locust "is the one that is fat . . . and it is fried and eaten."⁵⁶ The modest cricket "helps alleviate bladder pains when fried and eaten."⁵⁷

Miscellaneous aphrodisiacs

The ostrich's "flesh is nourishing and [possesses] aphrodisiac [powers]."⁵⁸ In fact, according to Amirdovlat, the following food sources increase the sexual prowess of men when eaten or used as ointment: camel's urine and testicles, lion's fat, peacock's flesh cooked in honey, sparrow's flesh and eggs, and thrush's broth and flesh.

Herbs, spices, and condiments

This group has the highest rate of citation for all food groups combined. Obviously, herbs, spices and condiments were in great use in the fifteenth century. The most commonly cited food enhancers (in descending order of frequency of citation) are: basil, safflower, marjoram, cardamom, pepper, asafetida, laurel, mustard, and cinnamon.

Fruits and nuts

The most commonly cited fruits and nuts (in descending order of the frequency of citation) are: grape (and all its derivatives), date, melon, walnut, prune, apricot, cherry, and fig.

Amirdovlat states that the apricot (*tsiran*)⁵⁹ was called "tufah ermani."⁶⁰ He advises that there are "many varieties [of apricot], the best being big and yellow

⁵⁰ From *Andropogon nardus* L., Gramineae.

⁵¹ From *Cinnamomum matala* F. Nees et Eberm, or *C. citriodorum* Thwait, Lauraceae.

⁵² Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 556.

⁵³ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 622.

⁵⁴ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1410.

⁵⁵ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1875.

⁵⁶ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1875.

⁵⁷ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 3100.

⁵⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2385.

⁵⁹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 1220.

⁶⁰ Armenian apple; see Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 910.

[that] can be found in the country of the Armenians." Also, the apricot "cuts the thirst [and the dried ones] should be left in water [to swell] then eaten." Various other fruits are presented and discussed: apple, grapes, pear, pomegranate, quince, white and red mulberry, etc.

Edibles and drinkables from other plants

The most commonly cited other edible plants (in descending order of frequency of citation) are: carrot, cucumber, fennel, asparagus, chicory, leek, cabbage, eggplant, fava beans, spinach, lettuce, and lentil. The list shows a good balance between salads, cooked vegetables, and legumes.

A mention should be made about manna that the Old Testament and the Qur'an both cite as a nutrient and a thirst-quencher. Hebrews are described as collecting and consuming the manna during their Forty-year wanderings in the Sinai desert. In point of fact, manna is a small and sweetish (moist or dry) secretion found, every morning, on or near certain desert trees or bushes. There are three plant species that are capable of producing manna or manna-like substances: tamarix,⁶¹ Persian manna tree,⁶² and the oak manna tree.⁶³ The manna is produced as a reaction to the puncture of the tree bark by the scale insect.⁶⁴ In the countries where it is found, manna is called *gazangubin*, *tarangubin*, or *khusgangubin*⁶⁵—names also provided by Amirdovlat, in his presentation of manna: "It descends to the ground," or "alights on the trees;" it can be found "in Amida,"⁶⁶ and "in the mountains of Persia . . . the good manna is moist and white."⁶⁷

It is of interest to note that Amirdovlat doesn't refer to coffee, tea, and tobacco.

Beverages

Amirdovlat very often cites wine and several such citations refer to "old wine." He states, for example, that "drinking old wine" can counteract the ill effects of opium.⁶⁸

Beer is "less inebriating than wine. It is made up of sprouted barley and honey . . . and when [consumed] mixed with quince, it strengthens the stomach."⁶⁹

Milk, of course, is considered to be a nutritious beverage and its sources are multiple: cow, camel, ewe, donkey, goat, and mare.

⁶¹ *Tamarix mannifera* Ehrenb. (Tamaricaceae).

⁶² *Alhagi maurorum* Medic. (Leguminosae).

⁶³ *Quercus persica* Jaub. et Sопach. (Cupuliferae).

⁶⁴ *Coccus maniparus*.

⁶⁵ All three names are based on the Persian word meaning honey (angubin). The prefixes mean, respectively, *gaz* (tamarisk, in Kurdish), *tar* (moist, in Farsi), and *khushk* (dry, in Farsi).

⁶⁶ Present day Diyarbakir, on the right bank of the Tigris River.

⁶⁷ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet* 597, 870, 1194, 1261, 2105, 2156.

⁶⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 8.

⁶⁹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 3745.

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF TWO EMBLEMATIC FOODS

Apukht or Pastirma

According to Adjarian,⁷⁰ the term *Apukht* is derived from the Pahlavi *pukht*, meaning, "cooked," which becomes *a-pukht* ("uncooked") with the adjunction of the privative prefix. As such, the term can be used, theoretically at least, to designate any number of dried-up meats, fish, and even breads, as noted in particular in the Armenian dialects of Sebastia, Gharabagh, and Erevan. Other languages have also used the term: Georgian *apokhti*, (dried meat or fish); and Polish *abucht*, "probably derived from the ancient dialect of medieval Armenians in Poland."

Amirdovlat provides another name for *Apukht*—*Namaksut*, from the Persian *namak* (salt) which is "meat salted and stored; it doesn't [immediately] dry and is used as needed. In our country beef and lamb are dried and preserved for years. I met people who told me that in Georgia this dried meat could be kept for twenty years."⁷¹ Amirdovlat talks about the *chaman*: "which is the *kamon* [cumin, *Cuminum cyminum* L.]."⁷² But this term connotes today more than cumin, i.e., *Carum carvi* L. and *Trigonella foenum-graecum* (fenugreek). Amirdovlat also states elsewhere that the undesirable effects of *Apukht* "will be mitigated if prepared with seasonings, including cumin, thyme, coriander and hot medicinal [plants]."⁷³

In fact, such dried preparations are popular in Armenia and Georgia, and include salted and dried fish called *Tarekh* in Armenian (from the Greek *tarixos*)—a species found in Lake Van.⁷⁴

The contemporary coating of *apukht*, is called *çemen*⁷⁵ in Turkish and *ch'aman*⁷⁶ in Armenian. This paste, made up with the ground seeds of various

⁷⁰ Apukht, in Hr. Acharyan, *Hayerēn armatakan baṛaran* (Armenian Etymological Dictionary), vol. 1 (Erevan: Erevani Hamalsarani Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1971).

⁷¹ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 324.

⁷² Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2609.

⁷³ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 2609.

⁷⁴ R.S. Ghazaryan and H.M. Avetisyan, *Mijin hayerēni baṛaran* (Middle Armenian Dictionary), vol. 2 (Erevan: Erevani Petakan Hamalsaran, 1992), p. 381.

⁷⁵ The *New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary* (Istanbul: Redhouse Yayinevi, 1968) defines *çemen* as cumin, ascribing to the word an Armenian origin. It also defines it as a mixture of ground condiments (fenugreek seed, red pepper, and garlic; used as coating of *pastirma*. T.X. Bianchi and J.D. Kieffer, *Dictionnaire Turc-Français*, vol. 1 (Paris: Typ. de Mme Dondey-Dupré, 1850), p. 645, defines *çemen* as "garden," suggesting that the "condiment" meaning was not in use in the mid 19th century.

⁷⁶ Guy de Lusignan's *Nouveau dictionnaire illustré Français-Arménien* (Constantinople: Hratarakich' S. Ashchean, 1909), p. 391, identifies *chaman* as cardamom. In turn, Malkhasiants' *Hayerēn bats'atrankan baṛaran* (Armenian Interpretative Dictionary), vol. 4 (Beirut: Tp. Sewan, 1983), p. 9, categorizes the different meaning of the word as follows: the European or Greek (*Caminum cyminum* L.), Armenian (*Carum carvi*), and the Turkish (*Trigonella foenum graecum*)

botanical species, generally called *chaman*, plus a mixture of paprika, pimienta and garlic, is then used to coat the salted then dried veal to give *apukht* or *pastirma* proper.

Which brings as naturally to the Turkish term *Pastirma*. What's the origin of this product? This is very difficult to establish. Originally, this seems to have been a Byzantine invention from Cappadocia, where underground dwellings were used to cure and dry a beef preparation called *paston*. Later, this product was probably refined in Caesarea (Kayseri), using quality meat obtained from veal grazing on the rich meadows near Mount Argeus. The nomadic Turkmens are ascribed the habit of carrying raw meat under their saddle. When they became sedentary and occupied western Anatolia, they must have prepared *pastirma*—either a product close to the *paston*, or something more attuned to their own taste. It is sometimes stated that they introduced this *pastirma* in their European conquests (e.g., Hungary and Romania), where it changed again to become the *pastrami*. Eastern European Jews then introduced this product into the United States.

Thus four cultures participated in the saga of the *Apukht* and the *pastirma*: Eastern Anatolian, Transcaucasian, Eastern Roman and Turkic.

Kashk

According to Françoise Aubail-Sallenave,⁷⁷ the word *kashk* is mentioned for the first time in Eghishē, an Armenian author of the fifth or sixth century, and is linguistically related to “the Pahlavi *kashkin* [which] meant then barley bread.”

Amirdovlat, a millennium later, describes *kashk* as follows: “A broth made from barley flour and sour milk [which] is thicker than barley water. . . . It diminishes thirst caused by heat and dryness.”⁷⁸ A little later, talking about *kavarekh*,⁷⁹ or animal feet, he adds that it is “best to prepare them with roasted barley,” though “they provide little nourishment.”

From the ninth century on, the word *kashk* appears in the medical and culinary Arabic literature⁸⁰ and is constantly deformed while its meaning and composition vary. It spreads widely from Azerbaijan to Spain, denoting the intense economic and socio-cultural ties between very different ethnocultures: Arab, Armenian, Azeri, Egyptian (Coptic and Moslem), Iranian, Iraqi, Jewish, Kurdish, Lebanese, Syrian, and Turkish.

The Turkish term *keshkek*—barley and meats (mutton or chicken) cooked together and pounded to give a rather homogenous paste—may be derived from

varieties.

⁷⁷ In *A Taste of Thyme, Culinary Cultures of the Middle East*, ed. Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper (London and New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2000).

⁷⁸ Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 3573.

⁷⁹ *Pacha* in Persian and Turkish; see Basmajian, *Angitats' anpet*, 3612.

⁸⁰ For example, in the medical texts of Al-Andalus Ibn Habib and of Ibn Sina, as well as in Ibn Sayyar Al-Warraq's *Kitab Tabikh* (Cookbook), ed. Kaj Öhrnberg and Sahban Mroueh (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1987).

"Kashk." Any number of preparations, using dry yoghurt, cheese and any milk product, are called "keshk," or "kashk." In turn, "kashkin" refers to various breads and preserves. In some recipes, wheat or other cereals replace barley. It is thus obvious that each ethnic group—receiving a type of "kashk" from another group—changes it according to the availability of food in its region as well as its gustatory preferences.

The settled Turcomans prepared the *kishk* "made from crushed wheat and yoghurt dried in the sun," while "the kind made by nomadic Turkmens, "is from yoghurt alone congealed in the sun, made into small loaves and dried."⁸¹

In North Africa, a recipe called *Kasksou bel foul*, meaning "Barley couscous,"⁸² otherwise known as *abelbûl* in parts of Morocco and Algeria, suggests an evolution from the barley-made *kashk* to the semolina-based variety, to give the present day "couscous." Nevertheless, the change of cereal in most parts has resulted in a complete change of cooking technique—boiling being replaced by steaming. In any event, the spread of couscous near and far is astonishing: *cùscusu trepanese* (Sicily), *maghrabiye* (Syro-Palestine), *kuskus* or *kusikusi* (African), and *cuscuz* (Brazil). In Africa, the couscous can be made with cultivated or wild grains, such as *Digitaria exilis*, and in Brazil the *cuscuz* is prepared from maize.⁸³ In Egypt and in Brazil, *couscous* is often served with sugar as a desert.

The *kishk* of the Copts is prepared with wheat that is moistened, dried and pounded; then, boiling water is poured over it and only that which can be pushed through a sieve is retained. This sieved preparation is finally added to cooked meats.⁸⁴ This recipe seems to be the transition from the Near Eastern *kashk* to the North African *couscous*.

CONCLUSIONS

Using Amirdovlat's work, we were able to paint a rather rich picture of what people ate in Anatolia during a crucial period of local and worldwide history. The diet of Anatolians in those days is surprisingly diverse and varied. In that sense, it is more conducive to good health than our modern eating habits.

In the years and decades following 1453, Armenians from various parts of Armenia and its Diasporas were transferred to Istanbul. There, their eating habits were modified due to various local influences: the new geo-climatic conditions, the presence of the sea and the beings that inhabited it, the strange life forms not pres-

⁸¹ Charles Perry, "The Description of Familiar Foods (*Kitâb Wasf al-At'ima al-Mu'tada*)," in Maxime Rodinson, A.J. Arberry, and Charles Perry, *Medieval Arab Cookery*, (Devon, England: Prospect Books, 2001), p. 323. Two manuscripts of this book are preserved in the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul.

⁸² Hadjira Mahboub and Claudine Rabaa, *Les Aventures du Couscous* (Arles: Actes sud - Sinbad, 2003), p. 27.

⁸³ Charles Perry, "Couscous and its Cousins," in Rodinson, et al., *Medieval Arab Cookery*, p. 235.

⁸⁴ Perry, "Description of Familiar Foods," p. 323.

ent in their prior surroundings, and the eating habits of the various people whom they met in the new capital city. In turn, they influenced the other Istambuliots with their own habits and skills. In time, this socio-cultural intermixing and the resulting development of new habits and attitudes would no doubt influence the nutritional habits in the rest of the Ottoman Empire.

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